

Memo

Reactions to Continuation or Termination of the Pause in Air Attacks on the DRV

19 January 1966

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JAN 2005

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(b) (3)

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

19 January 1966

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Reactions to Continuation ^{or} Termination of the Pause
in Air Attacks on the DRV

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the reactions of Communist and important non-
Communist nations to:

- I. A continuation of the bombing pause;
- II. A resumption of bombing in the DRV:
 - A. On the pre-pause pattern, with LOCs bombed to within defined limits from the Chinese border and no strikes within the Hanoi and Haiphong perimeters;
 - B. Extension of bombing to POL facilities, power plants, and other military associated targets including those within the Hanoi and Haiphong perimeters, where this could be done without major civilian casualties;

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

~~GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and
declassification~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

C. As in A and B, plus mining of Haiphong harbor
and the two lesser ports to the north.

For all three cases, it is assumed that SAM sites would be struck as necessary to carry out the program without unacceptable losses, and that airfields would be struck if, but only if, hostile air action became a significant impediment to the carrying out of the program.

We assume that, whether or not bombing is resumed, there will be a continued buildup of US forces in the South.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The great bulk of present evidence indicates that Hanoi is not prepared to make significant concessions in order to negotiate a settlement in Vietnam or to gain a prolonged cessation of US air attacks. This would not rule out private or public moves by Hanoi to test US terms for a settlement. Such efforts would, from their point of view, serve both to test US determination, now possibly under doubt in their minds, and also to encourage the US to prolong the pause. In our view, however, Hanoi's general attitude toward the pause and the US diplomatic efforts indicates that the DRV leaders intend to continue the insurrection in the South, even though they expect that if they do the US will eventually resume bombings, probably on an augmented scale.

- 2 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

2. There are a number of possible reasons for this attitude, including Chinese pressures and concern over Viet Cong cohesion during any possible negotiations. Moreover, behind these tactical considerations lie basic judgments by the North Vietnamese that they can absorb a great deal more bombing if necessary, and that they have political and military advantages which still promise ultimate success or at least a far more favorable settlement than the US appears willing to accept at this time. Thus, their hopes and morale ride almost entirely on the course of events in the South.

3. The Chinese make similar judgments. In addition, they believe that larger stakes are involved. They greatly fear that a negotiating phase in the Vietnam war would reinforce what they see as a Soviet-US collaboration to isolate China and stifle the world revolutionary movement. They have almost certainly urged a hard line on Hanoi during the pause, and have publicly warned against entering into any dealings with the US.

4. The Soviets probably take a more complicated view. They have reaffirmed their commitments to Hanoi in the face of the continued US buildup and the chances of renewed bombing. At the same time, they have made some effort to bring the US and the DRV into political contact in hopes of blocking further escalation.

- 3 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

We doubt that they have put much pressure on Hanoi to enter negotiations, but they have probably made clear Moscow's preference for primarily political tactics at this stage of the struggle. Their efforts have apparently failed, and they probably see no choice now but to persevere in supporting Hanoi while awaiting another opportunity for diplomacy.

5. The Non-Communist Countries. Most opinion, both governmental and private, is relieved that US air attacks have been suspended and hopes that negotiations can be arranged. In the middle ground between staunch US supporters and those alienated from US purposes, the contrast between US initiatives and the DRV's inflexibility has shifted onto Hanoi and Peking a larger share of the blame for an unpopular war. Except for certain US allies in Asia, most governments hope that escalation can be prevented, and several states are making or plan to make mediation efforts which, in their view, would be nullified by an early renewal of bombing.

II. REACTIONS TO CONTINUATION OF THE PAUSE

6. The DRV. It is possible that Hanoi intends to make some meaningful approach to the US. If so, the most logical time would be in the near future, at a point it calculated to be the last moment before the anticipated resumption of US bombing. Almost certainly it would not do so after bombing was resumed -- at least for some time.

- 4 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

7. Given Hanoi's attitudes as we now estimate them to be, however, an indefinite continuation of the bombing pause would almost certainly encourage the DRV to believe that continued struggle was on the right course. It would probably attribute prolongation to heavy foreign and domestic pressures on the US government. It might from time to time make minor political moves designed to encourage the US to extend the pause. But we do not believe that a prolonged pause would lead the DRV leaders to reduce their terms for a settlement so long as they still expected to prevail in the South.

8. Communist China. Peking would be encouraged by a continued bombing pause. The Chinese leaders would feel that the continued standdown has greatly reduced the chances of a Sino-US war and the risks of any call upon their air forces to try to defend the DRV. They would urge upon Hanoi that the failure to resume bombing was a sign of US weakness, and would claim that the policies they have advocated were being justified. They would still be concerned that the pause was related to diplomatic probings, and would continue to warn Hanoi against negotiations.

- 5 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

9. The USSR. The Soviets would not share the view that a continuation of the pause betrayed a fundamental US irresolution. They would probably still regard the US as committed to a long war in SVN, but they would be gratified that the pause limited the risks of their own involvement and relieved them of pressures to protect DRV airspace. Soviet policy toward Vietnam probably would not change much. The USSR would continue to supply military aid, but it would probably seek to keep alive the possibility of negotiations, hoping in this way to ward off future escalation and achieve a resolution which assured a continued Soviet presence in the area. If the pause were prolonged, the Soviets would feel somewhat freer to improve their relations with the US in other areas as opportunity and interest dictated.

10. Non-Communist World. Asian governments allied with the US, except Japan, would be distressed by prolongation of the bombing pause. In the GVN especially, morale would be lowered and doubts as to US constancy would grow. However, the continuing rapid buildup of US forces in the South would do much to relieve these feelings. In Japan, where the bombing of the North has been the major element in growing public opposition to the US course in Vietnam, continuation of the pause would be generally welcomed. As a result, the Sato government would be strengthened against leftist attacks on its handling of Southeast Asian policy.

- 6 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

11. The European allies of the US would in general be glad to see an indefinite prolongation of the pause in bombing. They would be relieved that the prospect of a widened war seemed thereby to be diminished. The uncommitted nations would probably give the US some credit for good intentions, but on the whole the effect among these nations would be not to win them to the US side but to diminish the degree of their opposition to the general US course in Vietnam.

III. REACTIONS TO RESUMPTION OF BOMBING

12. The DRV. Hanoi almost certainly expects the US to resume bombing in the absence of any conciliatory moves on their own part. If anyone in Hanoi seriously thought that the pause indicated an intention of the US to yield its position, he would be disabused. Hanoi might be confirmed in its declared view that the pause was no more than a device to strengthen the US political standing and justify an intensification of the war. There is a possibility that Hanoi would have misjudged the pause, miscalculated the intentions of the US, and be surprised by the resumption of bombing. In the unlikely event that this was true, a gradual renewal which began with targets related to the movement of men and supplies to the South, might cause the DRV to make some political moves to avert an expansion of the attack. We think it far more likely that Hanoi has discounted in advance the renewal of bombing and would be prepared to accept it.

- 7 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

13. As a general proposition, we believe that variations in the scope of the bombing would not produce significantly different responses from the DRV. Courses B and C would present them with greater physical difficulties than Course A. But in all of these contingencies we believe that Hanoi would continue to support the insurgency in the South and to defend its air space as best it could. At some point it might elaborate on the hint, planted by General Tolubko's visit, that continued escalation could bring Soviet surface-to-surface missiles into North Vietnam.

14. Communist China. Renewed bombing, even on the expanded scale of B and C, would not be likely to diminish the confidence of the Chinese in eventual victory through the techniques of "people's war." Indeed, though they would prefer a continued pause, they would even derive some satisfaction, in the event of renewal, from the obvious failure of the US and the Soviets to move the struggle to the negotiating table, from the increasing political and military costs to the US of the effort, from the hardening of the DRV attitude which bombing would produce, and from the continuing heavy dependence of the DRV on China.

15. On the other hand, renewed bombing, especially Courses B and C, would raise problems for the Chinese. They would feel that their boasted readiness to aid their small partner was being

- 8 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

tested in the eyes of the world. At the same time, they would be deeply worried that the war might spread to Chinese territory. It is likely that they would respond to enlarged air attacks on the DRV with greatly increased logistic support, including large additional numbers of engineer and supply troops and, possibly, anti-aircraft units. We think it unlikely that Peking would intervene in combat with aircraft or infantry. Nevertheless, the increase of their logistical presence in North Vietnam and the strengthening of their military position in South China improves their capabilities for such intervention should they decide to undertake it.

16. The USSR. The Soviets would belabor the US in public, would send more military aid to the DRV, and would make other gestures of support. We continue to believe, however, that the odds are against their intervening in radical new ways which would expose them to serious risks -- e.g., by introducing surface-to-surface ballistic missiles. The chances are somewhat greater that they would contribute KOMAR boats or cruise missiles. Moscow would also try to keep up US hopes for a peaceful settlement, working to achieve another pause in the future as a prelude to such a settlement.

- 9 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

17. The Non-Communist World. Resumption of air attacks would produce popular disappointment, much of which would be directed against the US. Nevertheless, the contrast between US efforts to get negotiations started and DRV inflexibility would cause a large share of the blame to fall on Hanoi and Peking. We believe that no states that now support the US policy would cease to do so. However, states which conceive of themselves as active mediators would feel that their efforts had been slighted. The most significant effect would probably be in Japan, where there would be renewed apprehension over Chinese involvement and pressures on Sato for a more neutral stance on Vietnam would grow.

18. The timing and manner of resumption would probably have some effect on initial non-Communist reactions. The tendency to blame the US would be appreciably strengthened if bombing were resumed immediately after Tet and if it were renewed on the scale of Course B or C. Conversely, Hanoi would bear a greater burden if major post-Tet offensives by VC/PAVN forces preceded the renewal of air attacks upon the North. Even in these circumstances, however, much of world opinion would tend, in time, to forget the particulars and to urge the US again to make concessions.

- 10 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

19. Special Considerations of Course B. Destruction of the main POL facilities and electric power plants would deprive the modern sector of the North Vietnamese economy of its main sources of power. However, this modern sector is not essential to the viability of the DRV. About 85 percent of the people live in rural areas and depend little if any on the modern sector. Traditional means of transport could provide the rather limited necessary circulation of food and clothing. The fundamental needs of the people would continue to be met. Nevertheless, many people would undergo great inconvenience; some would suffer serious hardships and personal losses; and civilian casualties would be higher than heretofore. These things would arouse protests in various parts of the world, especially among those who already oppose US policies. But we think that this kind of bombing would not create serious problems of popular morale in the DRV or weaken the regime's determination to resist.

20. Reactions Peculiar to Course C, Mining the Ports. During the past six months, calls at North Vietnamese ports by Free World ships, primarily vessels of British registry chartered by the Communists, have ranged between 11 and 21 a month. We believe that mining the main harbors, even with adequate warning to avoid unintentional damage to shipping, would bring increased attacks on

- 11 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

US policy throughout the Free World. The Norwegian and British governments, especially, would be under added domestic pressure to oppose the US actions. The UK government would indicate reservations about the mining, but would probably not vigorously press its case on the US nor oppose the action in public.

21. The Soviet Union would be presented with a particular dilemma. The difficulty of clearing such mine fields and the ease of rescowing would virtually rule out efforts to reopen the ports. The Soviets would certainly protest vigorously and might try for some kind of action in the UN. We do not believe, however, that the Soviets would risk their ships in mined Vietnamese harbors. Peking and Hanoi would try to keep the necessary supplies moving by shallow-draft coastal shipping and overland transport.

Impact on the Military Situation in the South

22. In the preceding paragraphs we have discussed our conclusion that renewed aerial attacks at A, B, or C levels would probably not produce a significant change in Communist policy with respect to Vietnam. We have stressed that Hanoi would be likely to be discouraged only if Communist forces were taking a consistent beating in the South. We must, therefore, consider what effect renewed bombing in the North would be likely to have on Communist military capabilities in the South.

- 12 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

(Continued...)

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

23. Resumption of pre-pause levels (Course A) would not have an appreciably different impact from that of the past few months, during which the Communists have been able to increase the level of their military activity in the South.

24. Course B attacks, if prosecuted vigorously enough, could knock out most of the DRV's modern industrial sector and substantially reduce its modern transport capability. However, this modern sector is not essential to the support of the insurgency in the South. DRV industry provides only a small part of the weapons and munitions sent South -- grenades, land mines, and some small-arms munitions -- and these could be replaced from Chinese sources.

25. Destruction of the major POL facilities would deprive the DRV of most of its stored POL. About 10,000 tons, or two-thirds of a normal month's supply, is estimated to be dispersed in drums and small tanks. Closing of Haiphong by mines would cut off the means by which most POL has been entering the country. Such losses would initially disorganize the Communist logistic effort, but they would probably resort to rail shipment to P'ing-hsiang on the Sino-Vietnamese border and truck shipment from there on (often moving at night), augmented by coastal shipping, to continue

- 13 -

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

essential supplies. Carts and wagons drawn by animals and humans could continue logistic support where POL was lacking. This was done in Vietnam during the war against the French and in Korea by the Chinese and North Koreans. Supply of the Communist troops in South Vietnam would be much more difficult than at present, but they could not be prevented from moving the relatively small amounts required even for an expansion of the levels of conflict in the South.* Thus we do not believe that even the maximum (Course C) level of air attack on the DRV would, in itself, have a critical impact on the combat ability of the Communist forces in South Vietnam.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

* The requirement for outside supply of the Communist forces in South Vietnam at recent levels of combat is estimated to average about 12 tons a day. Even with the Communist force increases projected by MACV for the end of 1966, and at greatly intensified levels of combat, requirements would average only about 165 tons a day. The weakest part of the lines of communication, the Lao corridor, is estimated to have a capacity of about 400 tons a day even under present levels of bombing.

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~